

December 2004

FREE



HUB

DIGITAL

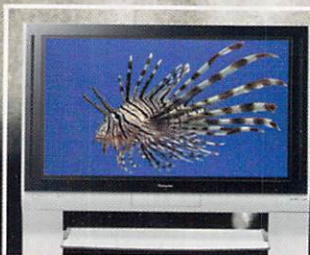
LIVING

Volume 17 Number 12

Holiday Gift Guide

Digital cameras
MP3 players
Video games
High-end
Stocking stuffers
DIY PC

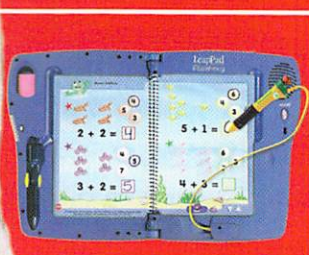
Phones for Food:
Recycle old phones for
your local food bank



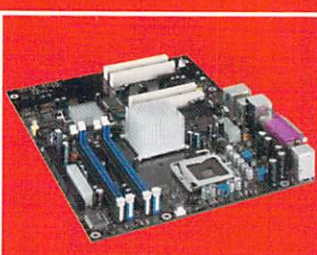
In the House



On the Move



Of the Mind



Digital Living

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After Rebate
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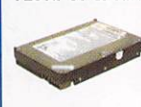
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Prices valid until December 24th, 2004, while supplies last. Subject to change w/o notice. Some items may not be exactly as illustrated. All warranty claims shown are based on manufacturer warranties.

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In selected regions ...

and online at www.hubcanada.com

Building the Ultimate Gaming PC
Part 2 of 5

Console gaming gift guide

Phones for food
The cause goes national

Holiday Shopping Clicks

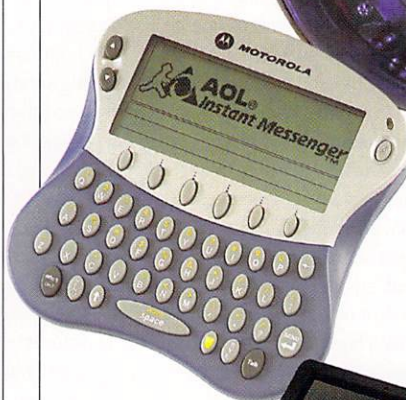
The gift of educational entertainment

Console video game gift guide

Console gaming gift guide
The right game console for you and yours

The gift of digital photography

Gift Guide: Stocking stuffers and other fun gifts





Ever feel like you're the last one to the table? Ever worry that in being the last one to the table, you're missing out on all the tastiest food and will be left with gristle or perhaps a neck bone to suck on? When I first heard about Google's ad-driven free email service when it was in early beta-of-a-beta stage, I searched far and wide for an. I keep seeing mail from soandso@gmail.com arriving in my inbox, so it can't be that hard right?

Granted the service offers at least equal benefit to the Google as it does to consumers looking for a larger email inbox. Given, emails are scanned and treated in much the same as Web content in the company's own context-sensitive advertising. Still, there's something to be said for snagging andrew@gmail.com as opposed to amoorescris2352103@gmail.com or other obscuretextstring@gmail.com. I guess that all I want this holiday season is a gmail account ...

assuming there are some good monikers still to be had. Of course, that's not entirely true. Any of the gadgets and gear written up in the pages that follow for our December Gift Guide issue will suffice, please and thanks. Happy holidays to all HUB readers.

Andrew Moore-Crispin

Nick Booker writes: The image bank that I now have has taken on new life from that of just a mere photo image gallery. I tend to pick through these from time to time and construct elaborate "themed" slide shows with music that I send to my parents and other relatives. The lowly photo has now taken on a new role as a star in my own personalized multimedia presentations.

Gail Penneway writes: My husband and I have just returned from a trip to Italy. As we usually have a little competition on who takes the best photos, we each took our own digital camera. We also went equipped with numerous memory cards and a product called RoadStor that burns your photos to CD.

We are presently sorting over 700 photos and editing them using Paint Shop Pro. Cropping photos and stitching together panoramic series of Tuscany's beautiful vistas has provided many enjoyable moments.

Paul Sturme writes: Since I have the capability to print my photos, I change my framed pictures 2 or 3 times a year to add variety to my walls and top of bookcases and dressers. That comes in handy when different family members come over to visit, or for seasonal celebrations like Christmas time.

Martin Plant writes: Being a fine artist and illustrator, I frequently send artwork samples to publishers and magazines. Going digital and using email, I can send my pics with no postal cost. I'll often get an answer sooner and replies take only a few minutes. The original pics stay in my possession. No handling damage is involved. Send out pics through snail mail? You've got to be kidding. For my pics it's digital all the way.

Naren Bhavnani writes: It's just a bit of creative fun, letting loose with the old imagination and no chemicals to mess with. We couldn't have dreamed about doing this at home with conventional film photography, just five short years ago. Of course, if you are really good, you may even end up with images to offer to stock agencies for commercial use. So don't shoot 'em and forget 'em - print 'em and/or manipulate 'em!.

Li Jia Ou (James) writes: As a new immigrant, I think digital photography is very valuable. I arrived Canada alone in March 2003 and since then I have taken more 15,000 digital pictures!

I seldom print them, whereas I often share them with my family and my friends in China. I have taken many pictures for my classmates, my teachers, my friends, my school, my apartment, the people and the view of Montreal.

Letter of the Month

The Letter of the Month was written by **Andy Currie** who writes: Pictures are my main forum of artistic expression and creativity these days, something I'm now able to indulge and cultivate more. And so the absolute best thing I do with my pictures is to tell everyone about their role in my happiness, because my digital camera was, after all, a sweet gift from someone sweet. [Thanks, Hon!]

For his letter, Andy wins a Konica Minolta 3.2 megapixel Dimage E323 digital camera. Please don't call us "Hon" in light of this, however.

This month, in addition to feedback on the issue, tell us **What gadget or piece of technology are you hoping for this holiday season?** Give us your thoughts: letters@ppublishing.ca.

The Letter of the Month will receive a Konica Minolta 3.2 megapixel Dimage E323 digital camera. This fully automatic camera has a 12X zoom range [3X Optical, 4X Digital], image rotation and slide show playback functions and a 6X megapixel Interpolation option for creating supersize images.



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Ultimate notebook meets virtual office



In our search for the perfect combination of size and performance, we came up with the X-Note series – notebooks that make no compromises. Starting with an Intel Centrino processor, we added one of the brightest LCD screens on the market, a 10-hour extended life battery* and a Quad Band wireless antenna, all packed into an ultra slim titanium and carbon fibre package that weighs a mere 2.4 kgs.

Now, virtual office doesn't have to mean virtual performance.



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Viper is perhaps the PC case modder's equivalent of the golfer that, while he or she has only just started playing, has the best clubs, the best shoes and all the gear (including the requisite pantaloons and jaunty cap). Rather than design and craft a mod (modified) PC, users can take the easier route and put together a system from components inside the Viper case.

It's a pretty cool mid tower ATX case with a 500 watt power supply, acrylic windows, graphic decals, accent lighting and LEDs.



MGE Viper Gamer ATX Case

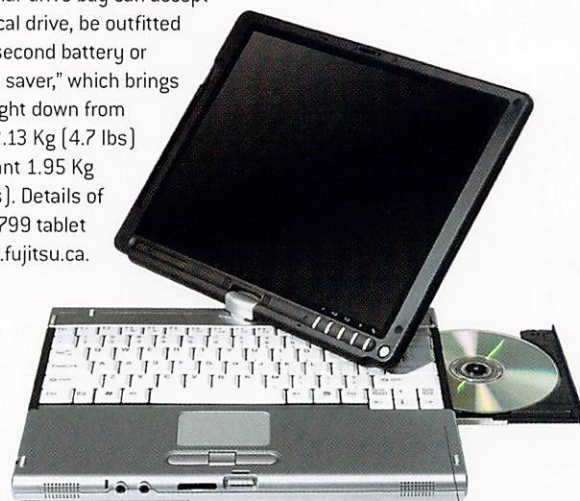
It's a heavy sucker, though top-mounted rails will help when carrying your rig to a LAN party. At about \$120 (from US\$99.99) aluminium, while an easier to carry choice, isn't a realistic option.

Think of the Viper as the halfway point between real case modding and buying a finished system from a major manufacturer with lame stickers and more of a wannabe attitude.

Fujitsu's latest series of Tablet PC improves on the company's previous models in a number of key ways. First and perhaps foremost is a wider viewing angle display. The company claims a full 180-degrees viewing angle for sharing information on the screen with others, as with a presentation, doctor's notes or a slide show.

Aimed primarily at professionals who rarely sit at a desk – doctors, corporate sales and other mobile workers – the T4000 unfolds into a small format laptop or can slide into a docking station.

A modular drive bay can accept an optical drive, be outfitted with a second battery or "weight saver," which brings the weight down from about 2.13 Kg (4.7 lbs) to a scant 1.95 Kg (4.3 lbs). Details of the \$2,799 tablet at www.fujitsu.ca.



Fujitsu LifeBook T4000 Series Tablet PC



The latest in a long line of products, services, television shows and publications using some variation of "extreme" in the title is an on-demand game delivery service with a

difference. The Game xStream title can be forgiven as at least somewhat clever, given that games are streamed (extremely?) to client PCs with an interesting packet-on-demand delivery method.

The differentiating factor of Game xStream (www.gamexstream.com) to other delivery services is in the delivery itself, according to DiStream president Dan Lutter. Games are played through by a group of in-house testers and as resources are loaded they are examined and algorithms are compiled to determine optimum delivery over broadband. The result is an uncharacteristically small initial download of between 50 and 200MB to start playing.

Resources are pre-delivered in the order they're needed according to the testing data with little or no delay, Lutter says. Also, data collected from community users as they play hones future deliveries.

The service is currently in limited beta.

Game xStream

Integrating solar panels into everyday items seems like a good idea. The Voltaic Backpack does just that.

On a rear zippered pocket reside three solar panels capable of generating up to four watts of power according to the company. An included battery pack collects the power and charges myriad devices, though only one at a time and provided one of the bundled adaptors and voltage settings is compatible. A car lighter adapter also included expands the possibilities while specialized adaptors (Sony Ericsson's proprietary plug ex.) can be purchased from the company's Web site (www.voltaicsystems.com)

The battery pack can also be charged using a car or AC travel charger for overcast days.

At press time, the product was scheduled to ship at the end of November, there's no word on Canadian availability except online.

At US\$229 plus shipping (plus Canadian customs charges), it might be easy being green, but it's not cheap.



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Gifts for the deep of pocket

A high-end tech gift guide

The unfortunate reality is that if you want the latest and greatest in technology, it's gonna cost you – even with all the pre-holiday bargains out there.

Sure, you can squeeze weeks of enjoyment out of a discounted PC game stocking stuffer or find happiness under the tree with an entry-level MP3 player, but for the really cool consumer tech you'll want to dig deep. Very deep.

Should your jeans have these kinds of bottomless pockets, the following is a look at a few recommended high-end, high-tech gifts. And of course we won't tell if you decide to keep 'em for yourself.

Panasonic Plasma Viera TH-50PX20

Who it's for: Movie fanatics and TV junkies

Price: \$10,999

Web site: www.panasonic.ca



If it's true thin is in then Panasonic's new plasma TV is a fashionable addition to any living room. At less than four inches deep, this super flat 50-

inch diagonal high-definition television (HDTV) can be mounted on a wall to save space, while the pedestal stand (included) gives the impression this 16:9 TV is simply floating in mid-air. Along with the sharp and bright picture quality (1366 x 768 pixels; 3000:1 contrast ratio), the Viera features two tuners and includes numerous input options such as High Definition and Multimedia Interface (HDMI) input and SD memory card and PCMCIA slots. Simply stunning.

Media Center Photosmart m1180n PC

Who it's for: Any interested in convergent technologies; music and TV lovers; gamers

Price: \$1,999 (monitor and speakers sold separately)

Web site: www.hp.ca



There are PCs and there are home theatres – and then there's the combination of the two in one product. Such is the case with the latest generation of Media Center PCs from HP and Microsoft. Not only is it a souped-up Pentium 4 with Intel's Hyper-Threading technology (perfect for gamers) but with the bundled remote you can use this machine as a television, DVD player with 7.1 surround sound support, DVD burner,

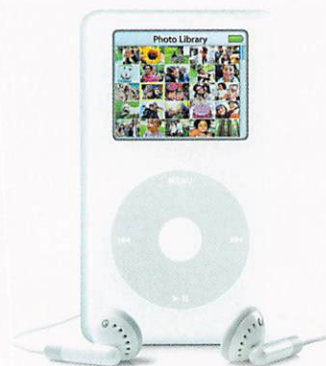
digital music jukebox, video and photo viewer/editor and best of all, a hard drive recorder to archive hundreds of hours of TV shows and movies thanks to its 250GB HD. It also ships with a 9-in-1 memory card reader, camera docking station and more.

iPod Photo 60GB

Who it's for: Music fans and picture takers who spend time out of the house

Price: \$799

Web site: www.apple.ca



If you're into music and photography, why not go top of the line and invest in portable device that lets you enjoy both with the spin of a wheel? Along with enough space to hold roughly 15,000 songs, the latest 60GB iPod from Apple can also be used to store about 25,000 digital photos that can be displayed on the unit's high-res colour screen. And considering you enjoy sharing photos with friends and family, why not add the right piece of music and launch a slideshow? The iPod Photo also features a TV

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Windows Server \$249/mo

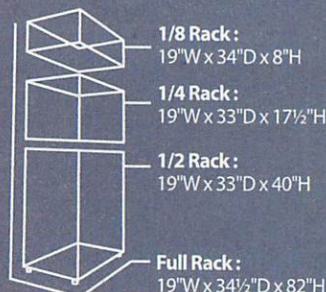
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Phones for food

Phones for Food: The cause goes national

The Phones-for-Food project is one of those concepts you instantly recognize as a good idea the first time you hear about it – a recycling effort that also provides money to food banks. Now that good idea has gone national, allowing Canadians across the country to dispose of their cell phones safely and in an environmentally friendly way while helping out a good cause.

The project launched in its first phase in early 2001 as thINK FOOD, an ink cartridge recycling fundraiser for Toronto's Daily Bread Food Bank. It swiftly expanded geographically from its Toronto base to become a provincial effort in September 2001 and a national venture in April 2003. In March 2003, the project also expanded in scope as cell phones were added to the recycling program. As of October 2004 the program gained national sponsorship from Rogers Wireless which collects phones at 1400 locations across Canada. Rogers joined founding national sponsor Petro-Canada, and national shipping sponsor Purolator.

In order to participate in the program, you can drop your old phone off at any Rogers Wireless distributor or Purolator outlet or set up a collection at a workplace or school. When the collection box is full, Purolator picks it up at no cost. At the Phones-for-Food depot, donated phones are sorted and their useable parts are then sold to the remanufacturing industry with the proceeds going to the Canadian Association of Food Banks (CAFB) and community food banks across the country. The Phones for Food program then recycles all remaining phones or unusable parts.

Community ties

Charles Seiden, Executive Director of The Canadian Association of Food Banks, echoes Sue Cox, Executive Director of the Toronto Daily Bread Food Bank, in calling the program "a no-brainer." He emphasizes the program's new national scope means that even the smaller food banks across Canada

will be able to participate in the project's efforts. He adds that local food banks often have a strong attachment to their communities, so he expects that the project will be strongly supported at the local level. The majority of the 230 food banks that the CAFB represents will be involved in the project.

In 2003, the CAFB moved almost nine million pounds of food industry donations to their members. For every dollar raised the CAFB says it can move \$75.00 worth of food.

Paul Denton, Director of Operations for thINK FOOD, along with Tamara Eberle, the project's National Development Director have been involved from

the beginning. As Denton explains it, the project stemmed from a concern over how to recycle cell phones, and soon developed as they realized it as an opportunity for charitable giving as well. Denton says the feedback has been "huge" and is pleased that the program has attracted the attention not only of large organizations but of small local groups as well that have helped out at the grassroots level across Canada.

Sponsors impressed

Rob Bruce, Chief Marketing Officer for Rogers Wireless says his company was impressed by the work that the Phones for Food project had already done, and wanted to put their support behind an organization that promoted environmental responsibility. He emphasizes that the availability of 1400 drop boxes at Rogers locations across Canada provides the public with a wide range of locations for

recycling. "That's 75 locations in Calgary alone," he says by way of example.

Already, the Phones-For-Food/thINK FOOD Project has won the Canadian Centre for Philanthropy's 2003 Imagine New Spirit of Community Partnership Award, and the Recycling Council of Ontario's 2002/2003 Waste Minimization Award. Besides winning awards, the project's numbers are also impressive: as of October 2004, over 30,000 phones and 230,000 cartridges had been collected, equalling about 750,000 pounds of food.

So with the holidays just around the corner, if you're thinking of buying a new cell phone, you might also consider giving one back.

To find a Phones-for-Food drop-off location near you (or to start your own collection site), visit www.phonesforfood.com

By Sue Bowness

Phones-for-Food: Just the facts

Established: 2001

Mission: to alleviate hunger and divert waste from landfill sites by raising funds for local food banks through the process of recycling used printer cartridges and cell phones.

Total phones collected (as of October 2004): over 30,000

Total ink cartridges collected: 230,000

Total pounds of food raised: 750,000
How to help: Drop off your old phones at one of 1400 Rogers locations, or start your own drop off site at your workplace or school.

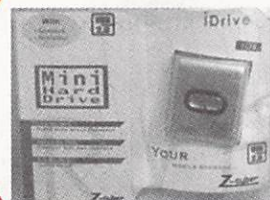


(Left to right)
Ed Borkowski, Purolator,
Sue Cox, Daily Bread
Food Bank of Toronto,
Charles Seiden, Canadian
Association of Food
Banks (CAFB), Rob
Bruce, Rogers Wireless,
and Allyson Zarowny,
Petro-Canada, donate
wireless phones for recycling in Toronto on Oct.
19, 2004.

iDrive

iDrive is mobile storage solution that is designed to let you carry your document files, music files, video clips and more. Its ultra slim size (only 8.5mm thickness) is small enough to be put right into your pocket. Covering with aluminum outer case, it makes the HDD durable and heat can be dissipated easily. With its USB 2.0 high speed interface, it allows data transfer speed at 32MB/s reading and 14MB/s writing. Real time video streaming is as easy as it gets.

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www.idrivefamily.com

The gift of digital photography

Canon PowerShot SD200

www.canon.ca

Estimated price: \$400

Pro: tiny, good price, 3x zoom

Con: small memory card included



The SD200 is one of the smallest Digital ELPH models yet. At less than an inch thick, the camera easily fits into a shirt pocket, but still features a 3x optical zoom and a 3.2MP sensor. The camera uses SecureDigital to store pictures but only comes with a 16MB card. Users can't exert much manual control but the camera offers a movie mode, easy switching between macro and landscape modes and the ability to print directly to PictBridge-enabled printers.

FujiFilm FinePix F440

www.fujifilm.ca

Estimated price: \$399

Pro: compact design, charging dock, easy F-menu

Con: small card included, finger grip doubles as on/off switch

The FinePix F440 is about the same size as a deck of cards and features a 4.1MP sensor and a 3.4x zoom lens that tucks neatly into the body when not in use. It's a pretty efficient design, though the dual-use finger grip/power switch requires some getting used to. The camera



comes with a paltry 16MB xD memory card. Though manual control is largely absent, the simple F-menu gives access to sensitivity (ISO 80-400) quality and colour (normal, chrome and B&W).

HP PhotoSmart R707

www.hp.ca

Estimated price: \$399

Pro: 5MP resolution, good price, 32MB internal memory, remote

Con: zoom unclearly listed as combination optical/digital, LCD grainy in low light

The PhotoSmart R707 sports 5MP resolution and a 3x optical zoom in a fairly compact and stylish casing; it also comes with a docking module that



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Intel Centrino-1.6G (M6BNE) \$1599

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serves as a charger and dock for transferring pics back to the computer. There's 32MB of onboard memory and a SecureDigital slot for further storage. The camera includes neat touches like the ability to set aside shots for emailing from the camera and a guided panorama mode.

Kodak EasyShare LS753

www.kodak.ca

Estimated price: \$480

Pro: compact design, 32MB internal memory, in-camera organization, remote

Con: zoom control awkward, template included but dock sold separately



Like all of the cameras in Kodak's EasyShare line, the compact 5MP LS753 can transfer pictures back to a PC with the touch of a button. The

controls can be a bit awkward to use, especially the zoom, but a bit of practice pays off. The camera has multiple shooting modes, (ex. movie, snow, beach, fireworks) and a user-friendly menu system.

Nikon Coolpix 4800

www.nikon.ca

Estimated price: \$570

Pro: great zoom, great macro

Con: small internal memory, no memory card

Nikon's 4MP Coolpix 4800 features an 8.3x optical zoom lens in its fairly standard design. The camera comes with 13.5MB of memory onboard. Thankfully it also features a SecureDigital slot for those who want to add more. While users can exert little manual control, there are a variety of shooting modes including an excellent macro capability that can focus on an object as close as 1cm.



Sony Cyber-shot DSC-L1

www.sonystyle.ca

Estimated price: \$450

Pro: very compact, good resolution and zoom
Con: tiny buttons



The most compact member of the Cyber-shot line, the L1 features a 4.1MP sensor and a 3x optical zoom. The camera uses the smaller MemoryStick Duo for storage and comes with an adapter so the memory can be used in full-sized MemoryStick slots. The camera also has a movie mode and an assortment of shooting modes (night, landscape, low-light and others). It can be a bit awkward to use if you have big hands (whether it's using the buttons or plugging it in for recharging) but once you get used to it, it's a great little camera.

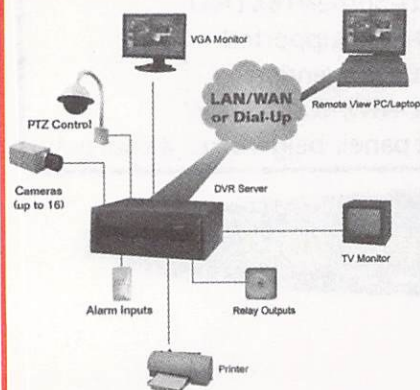
The L1 is available in either silver or black.

By Sean Carruthers

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Pleasing PC peripheral presents

Hewlett Packard Photosmart 375 Compact Photo Printer

www.hp.com

\$199.99

Pro: Printed pictures in a hurry

Con: Higher Price per image than photolabs

The HP Photosmart 375 looks a little like a very small toaster, with a shape and colour that make it one of the more attractive pieces of printing technology out there. Its refined aesthetic is matched by its efficient and functional design. Featuring a small LCD screen on top and a series of white

buttons beside it, users can easily perform simple photo editing procedures such as red eye reduction and printing without ever connecting to a PC — though printing from PCs is supported. It sports three memory card slots supporting CompactFlash, Memory Stick, MultiMediaCards and



Secure Digital cards, SmartMedia, and xD-Picture Cards. Impressively clear and detailed pictures take under a minute to print. The prohibitive price of colour and grayscale ink cartridges and the cost of quality photo paper, means that it's still cheaper to have digital photos printed at professional studios, but the Photosmart 375 is a good gift for traveling amateur photographers wanting immediate results.

Apple Wireless Keyboard

www.apple.com/keyboard

\$99.00

Pro: Apple's trademark elegant design

Con: Slight delay in keyboard response

The wonderfully simple layout and elegant design of Apple's wireless keyboard does justice to the company's reputation for chic and practical technology. Using the Bluetooth adapter built into PowerBooks and installed in iMacs (among other Apple PCs), the Apple Wireless Keyboard has an impressive range of up to 30 feet and provides secure 128-bit encryption to ensure no one can snag your keystrokes from the air. It uses the new



Apple Keyboard design, including multimedia controls and full size buttons, and features a power switch to ensure no energy is wasted when the keyboard is not in use. Most users won't have to replace the four AA batteries for months. The only problem is the occasional almost imperceptible delay in keyboard response. An ideal gift for Mac users who like to kick back while working.

Microsoft Optical Mouse by Starck

www.microsoft.com

\$54.95

Pro: Clicking with the palm of your hand

Con: The symmetrical shape may not be comfortable for everyone

Microsoft's new mouse designed by Phillipe Starck is an innovation in both visual and functional design. The curving hemispherical design

allows both left and right handed users to use the mouse with ease. The buttons, which run the length of the mouse, can be clicked by using the palm of the hand rather than fingers. The



orange or blue light strip between the two main buttons lights up, providing a high-tech mystique. Microsoft's proven optical sensor

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technology provides precise tracking, ensuring that the Starck mouse is as functional as it is pretty. The end result is a sleek, futuristic mouse that shakes up our traditional ideas of how a PC mouse should look and act.

Microsoft PC Fingerprint Reader

www.microsoft.com

\$74.95

Pro: Remarkably easy to set up and use

Con: One more piece of technology to clutter your desk



Even the computer geek who has everything probably doesn't have one of these. The brand new Microsoft fingerprint reader (available as a stand-alone unit, as reviewed here, or on Microsoft's Optical Desktop Keyboard) will help make life much easier for people who have a long

list of usernames and passwords. It only takes about three minutes to set up, scanning in as few or as many fingerprints as you like from one or both hands. Then, every time you visit a Web site or open an application that requires a username and password login, just touch the fingerprint reader to make your fingerprint your new username and password. Not only is it a more efficient and secure way to login to applications, it's also just plain cool. Every time you login to your computer you feel like a secret agent!

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Pro: All the backup space most home users will ever need

Con: Neither compact or pretty, no FireWire

It's not the sexiest gift around, but it is one of the most practical. We've all lost data from time to time thanks to viruses, hardware problems or just a good ol' fashioned Windows meltdown. Most of us are too lazy to keep on burning CDs and transferring bits of information to USB keys one at a time. Portable hard drives provide a safe and easy way to back up the contents of your entire computer in one relatively swift action. Maxtor's OneTouch USB and Firewire portable hard drives are tried and proven and offer capacities of up to 300 GB. The 160 GB model for home use provides all the room most of us will ever need at an affordable price. It sports a quiet 7200 RPM hard drive and a USB 2.0/1.1 interface for easy connection. Give it to someone you love this Christmas and sit back and wait for a call of gushing thanks to come your way sometime over the next year for having saved the recipient's precious files.

By Chad Sapieha

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40G, XP Home
Intel 855GME 64Mb
15" XGA, DVD/CDRW
802.11g



\$1500*

*After \$50 MIR

XNote LS50-BQUU1

1.5GHz, 2x256DDR
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15" SXGA+, 60G
XP Pro, DVD/CDRW
802.11g



\$2000*

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500:1 25ms
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Max.64M Video (Shared)
DVD/CDRW, 15.4"
MS XP Home



\$1160

EG375P-VE 370W

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exhaust fan is provided



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ATI R9700 64Mb
Wireless G, 15.4"
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Black/Silver



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Black color



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19" LCD
0.264mm
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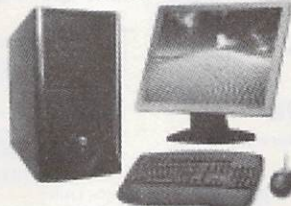
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Creative Labs Muvo NX 128mb 138⁹⁵ (Headphones, AAABattery, USB2, Microphone)
Creative Labs Muvo NX 256mb 157⁹⁵ (Headphones, AAABattery, USB2, Microphone)
Creative Labs Nomad Zen 40GB .. 315⁹⁵ (Headphones, LION battery, USB2)
Creative Labs Nomad Zen 60GB .. 414⁹⁵ (Headphones, LION battery, USB2)

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ZIRE 72 (312Mhz, 24mb, Colour) 307⁹⁵
TUNGSTEN E (126Mhz, 32mb) 243⁹⁵
TUNGSTEN T3 (400Mhz, 64mb, Blue) 381⁹⁵
TUNGSTEN T5 (416Mhz, 160mb, Blue) 444⁹⁵
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lpq 1940 (266Mhz, 64mb, Bluetooth) 367⁹⁵
lpq 2210 (400Mhz, 64mb, Blue/WiFi) 456⁹⁵
lpq 4150 (400Mhz, 64mb, Blue/WiFi) 506⁹⁵
lpq 4350 (400Mhz, 64mb, Blue/WiFi) 587⁹⁵
lpq 5550 (400Mhz, 128mb, Blue/WiFi) 751⁹⁵
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2300N (20ppm/1200 dpi) 1306⁹⁵
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PLEXTOR (PX-716A) 16x+ 8x-	166 ⁹⁵
LG (4160BB) 16x+ 8x-DL	98 ⁹⁵
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R9600SE/TD 128MB, DVI, AGP	108 ⁹⁵
R9600XT/TD 128MB, DVI, AGP	221 ⁹⁵
AX300SE 128MB, TVOut, PCIX	105 ⁹⁵
AX600PRO 128MB, TVOut, PCIX	198 ⁹⁵
AX600XT 128MB, TVOut, PCIX	260 ⁹⁵
AX600XTHD 128MB, TVOut, PCIX	274 ⁹⁵
AX800PRO 256MB, TVOut	562 ⁹⁵
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Building the Ultimate Gaming PC: Part Two

Having tackled the first stage of Building the Ultimate Gaming PC, I am thinking of renaming this series "Lessons in Humility." The reason: even though I am a regular guy – not an engineering guru – taking on a challenging project, I am still amazed by some of the bone-headed mistakes I have made (and corrected) to date.

Step One: Building the acrylic mid tower ATX case

The Mutant Mods case came totally unassembled. The good news is that the instructions were quite clear, the parts list detailed and each of the parts bags is clearly labeled. My first word of advice: check the contents of the box against the parts list, to ensure that you've got everything you need. As well, checking the parts list – I'm talking about reading it; not just giving it the once-over as I initially did – will prevent you from doing dumb things like attaching the fans with the wrong screws. More on that later.

In general, the Mutant Mods case was relatively easy to assemble. Since the screws I was using were being tightened against acrylic, I was careful not to over crank them to prevent the plastic from cracking. As well, I wore the supplied white gloves to keep body oils off the plastic, and was very diligent when using a screwdriver on the screw's slot heads, to prevent the blade from sliding off and scratching the case. (Note to Mutant Mods: Phillips' X-shaped heads would make more sense!) I then screwed the motherboard mounting posts into one side of the case by hand, and put the bottom-mounted speaker in place as well.

I had some problems fitting the plastic side panels to the corner connector cubes, because some of the holes wouldn't line up properly. In these cases, I rotated my small slot-head screwdriver in the hole to widen it. In general, however, the Mutant Mods case went together pretty easily, although the screeching sound that occurred when turning screws into acrylic was nerve-wracking at times.

Step Two: Adding the power supply

For this project, Mutant Mods provided a 480 watt power supply known as "The Reactor." It came with two blue LED-lit fans, a heavy duty heat sink, and lots of power connectors. Time will tell if the Reactor has enough connectors to power all of the extra lights planned for this unit; at first blush, it looks sufficient.

Installing The Reactor in the back of the case was tricky. The problem is that the power supply sits suspended from its four screw mounts: this meant I had to prop it up with one hand while putting in the screws with

the other. Thankfully, the open side of the case allowed me to slip my hand in to provide support. I first finger-tightened all four Phillips screws to get The Reactor lined up properly, then finished the job with my screwdriver.

I had to guess where to put the power supply, since the Reactor's instructions didn't have this information. Instead, they simply said, "Remove the existing power supply from your computer case and replace it with the new power supply", which didn't help me at all. The Mutant Mods case manual didn't explain how to install the power supply and neither did Maximum PC's "Guide to Building a Dream PC" handbook.

Step Three: Adding the Fans and Covers

My mission was to install three Mutant Mod LED-lit fans and decorative fanguards behind vent holes cut into the case's front, top, and side panel.

Again, there were no instructions to go by. Making matters worse was the fact that I hadn't read the case parts list fully; if I had, I would have noticed that Mutant Mods had supplied 12 special "fan screws."

Adding to the fun is that two of the Mutant Mod fanguards were made of cut-out clear acrylic. Designed to be lit by built-in LEDs – one to illuminate a "Scream" style ghost face; the other to highlight a sideview of a soldier – these fanguards apparently had to be mounted between the fans and the inside walls of the case.

This posed two problems. First, the power cord for each fanguard light was routed through a corner of the plastic square: to make room for it, Mutant Mods had cut off one of the four screw holes. Second, since I was using the screws which came with the Mutant Mods parts – which weren't fully compatible with the case – driving them in was slow and difficult. Did I mention that some of the holes also didn't line up?

Eventually, my efforts to mount the soldier fanguard and LED fan led to my snapping the LED power cord off. No problem; I removed it, then shaved the corner to let me mount the fan with four screws. (By this point, I was using the ones supplied with the case, having at last read the parts list in full.) I did manage to get the Scream fanguard cover and fan in place without problems. I'll have to wait to see if mounting it using only three screws is sufficient.

Lessons Learned

Clearly, one should always read the parts list fully before proceeding! Next, my wife/photographer's insistence on keeping my work space clean and organized – with all necessary tools and parts at hand – was good advice. As well, it makes sense to have a jar handy to store all loose parts.

All things considered, this part of the job was harder and took more time than I expected. Especially when you're working around cats.

Next Time: Mounting the Motherboard

With the case, power supply, and fans in place, the next step is to mount the Intel D925XCV motherboard and the Intel 3.6 GHz Pentium 4 Extreme Edition CPU chip. Based on the instructions supplied by Intel, this step looks simple. However, we'll see how easy it is in real life.

By James Careless

James Careless is a regular contributor to HUB Digital Living who has perhaps gotten in over his head this time.



MP3 and company

Creative MuVo Micro N200

www.nomadworld.com

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Pro: compact, line-in, FM and voice recording, better earphones

Con: needs USB cable, line in recording may require adapter

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www.apple.ca

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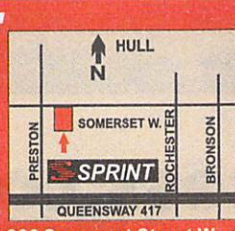
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Kids & tweens gift guide

Juice Box Personal Media Player

Mattel \$85 (from US\$69.99)

www.juicebox.com Age: 8-12

Pro

- Relatively inexpensive
- Good battery life
- Targeted content available

Con

- Hyper proprietary
- Limited content
- Screen slightly grainy



Mattel's Juice Box is aimed at kids with gadget lust and parents that don't want to break the bank satiating it. Video volumes come on small proprietary cartridges of varying capacities from 16 to 64MB. All videos tested shipped on 32MB cartridges containing between two and four standard length cartoons (without commercials). Video quality is about on par with reasonable quality streaming Web video.

Content selection is respectable but limited, as license agreements have to be worked out for all content. We looked at Yu-Gi-Oh!, The Grim Adventures of Billy and Mandy and Codename: Kids Next Door.

An MP3 Starter Kit (not included) comes with a 32MB SecureDigital card, USB card reader and an adapter for the proprietary media slot. It expands the functionality and allows for non-specifically licensed audio files to be played and can display JPEG images on the Juice Box screen.

Game Boy Advance may prove a better purchase for video specifically, however as the line of Game Boy Advance Video software is about on par with that of the Juice Box ... and it plays games too.

LeapPad Learning System Plus Writing

LeapFrog \$79.99

www.leapfrog Age: 4-8

Pro

- Play and learn
- Electronic and visible feedback
- New software and books available

Con

- Limited software library
- Software specific to each LeapFrog iteration

LeapFrog's line of educational toys has already proven a hit with parents. While kids play they also learn skills like early reading, counting, printing, colours and phonics. The LeapPad Learning System Plus Writing ships with a "Reading Writing and Math [pre-kindergarten to first grade] cartridge and book. Subsequent book

and cartridge packages go for about \$20.

A wired stylus' movements are tracked on the page, allowing for maze games, tapping games ("touch the red bird"), counting games and the like.



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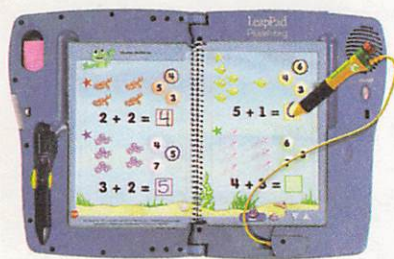
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A mechanical pencil assembly in the stylus gives visual feedback where appropriate too. For example, kids are asked to trace the letters of the alphabet. The electronic portion recognizes whether or not letters are traced properly and the erasable pencil marks allow kids to see the result for themselves.

Children's Talking Dictionary

Franklin \$60 (from US\$49.99)
www.franklin.com Age: 6-12

Pro

- It speaks!
- 44,000 word vocabulary
- Word-related games

Con

- American instead of Canadian spellings
- Speaker tinny

Franklin's Children's Talking Dictionary with Spell Corrector is essentially a more kid-friendly interface on a standard digital dictionary. With 44,000 words and elementary explanations, a phonetic spell checker ("cureeus" becomes "curious" for example), a cursive handwriting guide which paints letters on screen



<http://www.guntaiware.com>

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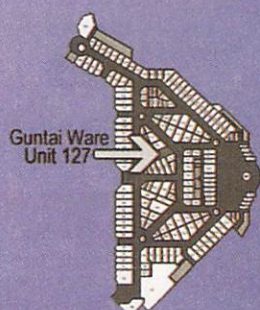
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All prices have been 3% cash discounted and are subject to all applicable taxes. Prices, specifications and availability are subject to change without notice

along with a few fun word-related games like Hangman and Word Jumble. Be aware however that kids are getting American spellings as opposed to Canadian.

IM Free Personal Instant Messenger Mx240

Motorola \$120 (from US\$99.99)
www.motorola.com/imfree Age: 10-14

Pro

- Frees up family PC
- Up to six chats at once
- Kids feel ownership

Con

- Limited parental controls
- 12-hour charge before use
- No LCD screen light

If "tweens" in your household are tying up and fighting over the computer like you may have tied up and fought over use of the telephone at the same age, Motorola's IM Free has the potential to be a gift for both you and the kids.

Up to seven of the BlackBerry-sized devices can link up with the home PC wirelessly and allow users to chat over AOL's Instant Messenger program (AIM, free download) without actually sitting at the computer. Once the USB receiver is plugged in, drivers installed and the IM Free device(s) paired with the receiver (using a six-character string), kids can send and receive messages with friends using the QWERTY keypad. A nine line monochrome LCD display



(unfortunately unlit) displays the messages and up to six chat sessions can be open at the same time.

Kids are likely to be disappointed when they discover that the device can't be used before it's been charged for 12 hours using the included AC adapter.

Lizzy McGuire / That's So Raven

Disney Interactive \$39.99

disney.store.go.com Age: 8-12

Pro

- True to show style graphics and audio
- Stars show characters

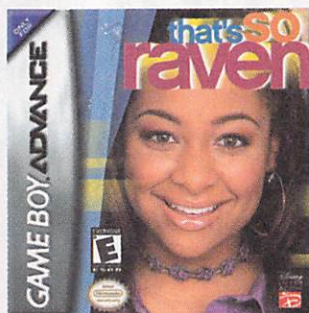
Con

- Overly simple
- Little chance / desire for parents to get involved

Boys on your list probably won't be too happy to receive either of these Game Boy Advance titles. However, if someone on your list is getting the new pink-shelled Game Boy Advance SP, either title may prove a good addition.

I don't claim to understand what girls want in a game. Perhaps Disney Interactive has a better handle. Both games star the respective characters in a school setting gathering items and talking to show characters to progress. Simplistic but likely enjoyable for fans of the shows.

By Andrew Moore-Crispin



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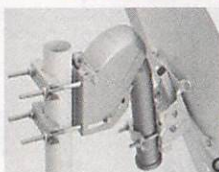
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Holiday shopping clicks

Online shopping saves headaches, time, even money

The holiday shopping period is as inevitable as, yes, death and taxes.

You can count on a long list of items and too little time, not to mention an overbearing sense of anxiety, as thousands of others just like you head out with the same frenzy.

Enter holiday shopping 2004 – Internet style. “Every year it increases,” says Helen Popkin, associate editor of ConsumerReports.org, speaking of shopping online. “Every year people are more comfortable. The sites are easier to use.”

According to Statistics Canada, in 2003 Canadians spent over \$3 billion online – about 25 per cent more than in 2002. Although that’s only a small fraction of the \$688 billion spent overall by Canadians, it does show Internet shopping is on the rise.

For every \$10 spent by households on Internet purchases last year, \$6.90 was spent on Canadian Web sites, according to Statistics Canada. Apparently we’re mad for Made In Canada – even if it’s virtual.

OpenVenue e-Research Solutions’ recent online

poll of visitors to the Sympatico.MSN.ca Web site gives an even tighter shot of online shopping as it pertains to the holidays. According to the survey, 42 per cent of respondents plan to purchase gifts online – that’s an increase from 33 per cent last year and only 23 per cent in 2002. “Of the Canadians planning to buy gifts online this year, 98 per cent believe online shopping saves time, and 73 per cent always look for the best deals before buying,” says the report.

What to look out for

We all know the drill when it comes to brick-and-mortar shopping. Check the return policy, make sure the item is in good shape right out of the box, if it’s not a reputable outlet, be prepared for the consequences.

Shopping online should be the same – and then some. Some questions to ask before filling the cart:

Will my shopping be safe and secure?

To ensure your credit card information doesn’t go astray, make sure the site has SSL (Secure

Socket Layer), identified with “https” in the URL and a padlock, unbroken key icon or similar (depending on your browser) in the bottom right. If you want your personal information to remain private, make sure there’s a privacy policy that lets you opt in or out of receiving solicitations, cautions Popkin.

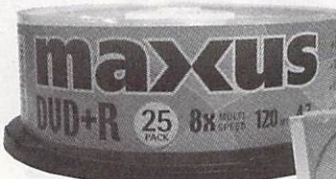
Will my package make it in time for Christmas?

Some sites, like Canadiantire.ca, have special sections that give details on the last date possible to order online. The order deadline for Christmas delivery in the GTA, for example, is December 17 (nix that idea of last minute ordering!).

“Some sites will deliver overnight for delivery on Christmas day,” says Popkin. “But you’re going to be paying a lot of money for that.” If you’re really late – consider sending a gift certificate (which can be done at the last minute.)

How much extra will I be paying?


Part of the joy of online shopping is having the parcel shipped to the destination of choice – faster or cheaper, depending on your preference. Some local stores also allow for no cost pick-ups. But before you decide that cousin Rick, for example, *has* to have that item – make sure



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 256Mb DDR Ram, PC2700 - see web
 Enlight Mid-Tower w/ Enlight 300W 335 - see web

ASUS SEMPRON UPGRADE BUNDLE

AMD Retail-Boxed Sempron CPU 2400+ see web
 ASUS A7N8X-X Motherboard 2500+ see web
 512Mb DDR Ram, PC2300 2600+ see web
 Enlight Mid-Tower w/ Enlight 300W 2800+ see web

ASUS PRESCOTT UPGRADE BUNDLE

Intel Retail-Boxed Pentium 4 CPU 530 - see web
 ASUS P5B00 Motherboard 540 - see web
 512Mb DDR Ram, PC2300 550 - see web
 Chenbro Mid-Tower w/ Enlight 350W 560 - see web

ASUS ATHLON 64 UPGRADE BUNDLE

AMD Retail-Boxed Athlon 64 CPU 3000+ see web
 ASUS ABV Deluxe Motherboard 3200+ see web
 1Gb DDR Ram, PC2300 (2 x 512Mb) 3500+ see web
 Chenbro Mid-Tower w/ Enlight 450W 4000+ see web

Premier CPUs and Memory

AMD Sempron 2400+ (Socket A) 333MHz - see web
 AMD Sempron 2500+ (Socket A) 333MHz - see web
 AMD Sempron 2600+ (Socket A) 333MHz - see web
 AMD Sempron 2800+ (Socket A) 333MHz - see web
 AMD Sempron 3000+ (Socket A) 333MHz - see web
 AMD Sempron 3100+ (Socket 754) - see web
 AMD Athlon XP 2600+ (Socket A) 400MHz - see web
 AMD Athlon 64 2600+ (Socket 754) 512K - see web
 AMD Athlon 64 3000+ (Socket 754) 512K - see web
 AMD Athlon 64 3200+ (Socket 754) 512K - see web
 AMD Athlon 64 3500+ (Socket 754) 512K - see web
 AMD Athlon 64 3800+ (Socket 754) 512K - see web
 AMD Athlon 64 4000+ (Socket 754) 512K - see web
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"Even if you want to make the purchase in the store, online is a great way to compare prices," says Popkin.

retailcanada.com

Start with the map of Canada, and either click on a geographic area or browse by category to find the store you need. You can also search by keyword and company name, although this is not always reliable (for example, company name "Canadian Tire" gives no hits, while "canadiantire" does).

Your best bet is to go by region, because while "books" gives only 14 generic hits, 22 bookstores are listed for Toronto, for example. Great if you want to touch the merchandise.

canadasites.com

"Your guide to the best of Canada online" is a basic, well-organized site with links to online shops across Canada. Provincial borders have no place here, because although the shops may have brick-and-mortar locations, the intent is to provide e-commerce links. You'll find everything from perfumes.ca, to Rogers Chocolates in BC (they ship, of course), to various automotive needs.

Bonus: all prices are quoted in Canadian dollars.

greatcanadianshopping.com

"Canada's shopping portal" lists "only Canadian

stores, who charge in Canadian Funds, offer full online shopping, with a secure server. All sites have been Human Checked."

While the site apparently plans to offer "quick reviews" — only a handful of sites have them, and it's then apparent how helpful this would be. Archambault.ca, for example, is in French only.

canadianshoppingdeals.com

This site spells it out loud and clear what country the store operates from, what it offers, what funds prices are quoted, and whether it ships to Canada. You also get to read brief descriptions of the stores, so no need to spend inordinate amounts of time clicking. Not sure about the deals part of shopping, though. The site lists everyone from the Palm store to Delivery.ca's restaurant food delivery service.

Kids gifts (Canadian)

When it comes to kids gifts, you want a good price, but you also want to know that the toy you're buying will withstand the test of time (even if that means only the duration of the holidays). Check out these toy-testing sites — then head over to some of the stores with online components and start searching.

toy-testing.org

To get a feel for the best toys of the year, head

over to the Canadian Toy Testing Council. For the past 50 years, the Canadian Toy Testing Council has been giving kids, ages three months to 16 years, six to 12 weeks toys to take home and test their design, function, durability and play value.

The final result is age-appropriate star ratings in various categories. Children's Choice Awards go to new toys that are "fun, innovative and the absolute best in their area of play."

neighbourhoodtoystores.ca

If you have a favourite toy store, chances are it has helped the Neighbourhood Toy Stores of Canada determine toys deserving of Gold Star Awards. Their Criteria? "Top quality toys that give the best play value to children."

New to the site this year: click on the map of Canada and search for your local toy store's online component. Since this is a service provided by Neighbourhood Toy Stores, this means that virtually all toy stores in Canada are slowly moving to the Web. Even Treasure Island Toys — my local toy store down the street.

Other recommended childrens online shopping sites include: grandrivertoys.com, scienceandnature.ca, mastermindtoys.com, cdromstore.com, elementsofnature.com

By Mara Gulens

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On-Board High Definition Audio 8-channel
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Deluxe Multimedia Internet Keyboard
1.44MB Panasonic Floppy Drive



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LG DVD Writer 16X DVD±R/W Drive (4160)
On-Board 3D 6-Channel Sound
06 2.1 Sub-Woofer Speakers System
100/1000 Gigabit LAN Network Controller
16" Tower w/ Thermaltake 420W Power
Optical Wheel Mouse USB &
Deluxe Multimedia Internet Keyboard
1.44MB Panasonic Floppy Drive



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AMD3200+

AMD ATHLON 64 3200+

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WD 200GB Serial-ATA 7200rpm HDD
ATI Radeon 9550 256MB DVI TV-OUT
LG DVD Writer 16X DVD±R/W Drive (4160)
On-Board 3D 6-Channel Sound
06 2.1 Sub-Woofer Speakers System
100/1000 Gigabit LAN Network Controller
16" Tower w/ Thermaltake 420W Power
Microsoft Optical Wheel Mouse &
Microsoft Multimedia Internet Keyboard
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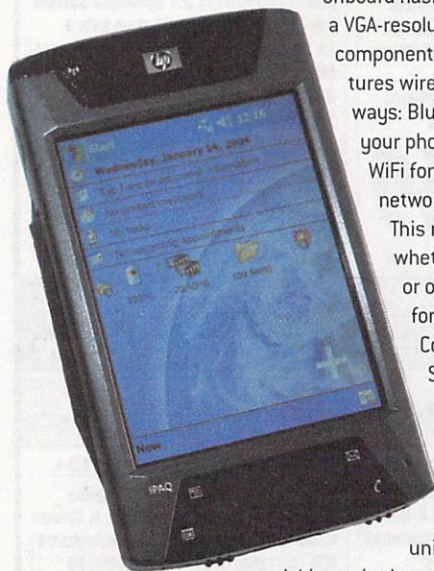
www.hp.ca Estimated price: \$860

Pro: WiFi and Bluetooth, CF and SD slots

Con: pricey

One of the newest iPaq models really tops up when it comes to features: it comes with a blazing-fast 624 MHz XScale processor, has 128MB of onboard flash memory and comes with a VGA-resolution (480x640) graphics component. In addition, HX4700 features wireless connectivity in two ways: Bluetooth for connecting to your phone or printer and 802.11b WiFi for connecting to a wireless network.

This means users can connect whether at the office, at home or on the road. Integrated slots for both Type I/II CompactFlash and SecureDigital means the possibility of extra storage space and add-on peripherals. The HX4700 ships with a USB sync cradle that also charges the unit between uses. The big sticking point here is the high price.



maybe a bit on the blocky side, but with so much crammed under the hood, it's hard to complain.

Palm OS based

PalmOne Tungsten T5

www.palmone.com/T5 Estimated price: \$599

Pro: extra-thin, drag-and-drop file transfer, 256MB of onboard memory

Con: battery not user-accessible

The Tungsten T5 is the newest offering from PalmOne's premier handheld line, and it offers a few upgrades to the Tungsten T lineup. While it doesn't have a sliding bottom half like the T3 it keeps the full-screen display. The graffiti pad pops up on the screen when requested. At only 15 mm thick, the unit is ultra-slim, but it still manages to squeeze in a 320x480 colour screen, Bluetooth connectivity and a full 256MB of memory. The menu system has also been redesigned, offering up applications in either old-school or list views. The new software also allows better synchronization with home computers, allowing users to drag and drop files directly onto the unit instead of forcing synchronization; this also allows it to be used as a removable drive for transporting files from PC to PC. The Tungsten T5 connects to the computer using USB and is compatible with both Windows (2000/XP) and Mac (OS X). The T5 features a SecureDigital slot for SDIO-compliant accessories or removable memory.



Toshiba e830

www.toshiba.ca Estimated price: \$699

Pro: both Bluetooth and WiFi, great resolution

Con: bulky

The Toshiba e830 is an updated version of the e800. It has the 520 MHz Xscale processor for peppy response time, comes with 128MB of main memory and expansion slots for both Type I/II CompactFlash and SecureDigital memory. The e830 comes with Bluetooth connectivity and 802.11b WiFi networking, allowing for use whenever there's an open access point nearby. As with the last version, the screen is excellent, the handheld's graphics processor handles resolutions up to 480x640. It's

PalmOne Zire 72

www.palmone.com Estimated price: \$399

Pro: 1.2MP camera, Bluetooth onboard, great screen

Con: only 32 MB memory

When you put a camera into another gadget – cell phone, handheld – the camera component tends to be a bit dicey. Not so with the Zire 72, which has a 1.2MP camera incorporated; under good lighting conditions the

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images will be just fine. The big downside here is that the unit only comes with 32MB of memory onboard, so if you take a lot of photos it'll really start to eat up your free space. The solution is to budget a bit extra for a SecureDigital memory card to store your images: the Zire 72 has an SD slot on the top for extra memory or add-on devices (like the optional MP3 expansion card).

By Sean Carruthers



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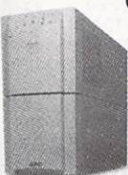
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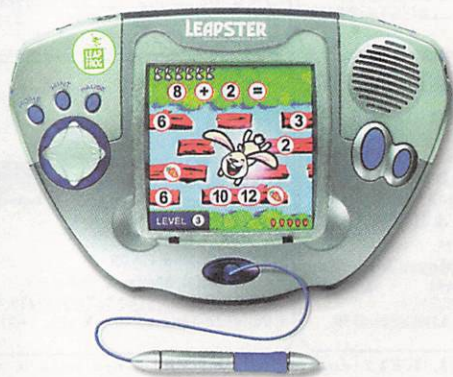
www.leapfrog.com

System: \$99.99 Games: \$34.99 each

Ages: 4-10 years

Pro: Portable

Con: Small software library



A handheld game platform complete with stylus and touch screen, Leapster offers youngsters a small but high-quality library of learning games. Dora the Explorer: Wildlife Rescue features five separate games with

some 45 learning concepts including math, reading, and science. SpongeBob SquarePants Saves the Day also features a broad depth of learning challenges, including phonics, money concepts and spelling. To stimulate kids' creative juices, Mr. Pencil's Learn to Write and Draw provides more than 150 exercises that make use of Leapster's stylus interface, teaching children how to draw animals and objects and how to write letters and numbers. Reading with Phonics tells a story that includes fun and challenging reading activities. Far more educational than standard portable gaming fare, Leapster is a sacred piece of common ground between kids who want to play games and parents who want them to spend their time with more constructive activities.

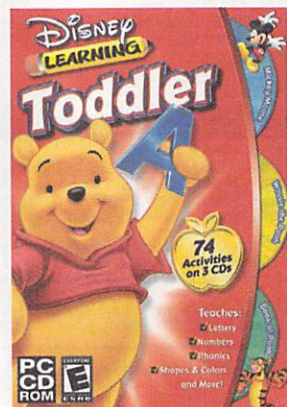
Disney Learning series

disney.store.go.com

\$19.99 each Ages: 2-8

Pro: Excellent value

Con: Too few subjects for older children



Disney Interactive's Learning series features a variety of games suitable for kids who are learning to talk all the way up to those in second grade. Each title in the series has between 60 and 90 interactive games and activities with compelling cartoon-like graphics that will grab children's attention.

Toddler

Meant for kids around 2 years old, Disney Learning - Toddler is a great

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way to introduce children to computers. Mickey Mouse and his pals help kids learn to recognize numbers and letters, make music and explore shapes and colors while Winnie the Pooh and company lead children through memory games, elementary logic puzzles and sing-alongs.

Preschool

Aimed at three- and four-year-olds, Disney Learning – Preschool picks up where Toddler leaves off, providing kids with more complex games and challenges. Mickey directs kids in creative activities such as putting together picture puzzles and recognizing patterns, Winnie teaches kids words in Spanish and French, and a

Disney Learning – Kindergarten has games and activities that manage the tricky task of holding a five year-old's attention. Winnie and Mickey challenge kids with language games that let them practice spelling and grammar and introduce more advanced concepts like rhyming. This edition also teaches the basics of reading by inserting pictures of objects instead of words in sentences, allowing children to choose the word that matches the picture.

1st-2nd Grade

The series culminates in Disney Learning – 1st-2nd Grade, which incorporates Disney characters popular among older children. Buzz Lightyear quizzes kids on world geography, Woody teaches kids more advanced time-telling concepts, and Aladdin leads children through the basics of creating and telling a story. 1st-2nd Grade concludes with a learning adventure game that puts kids' analytical thinking and deductive reasoning skills to the test.

Baby Einstein – Baby Noah

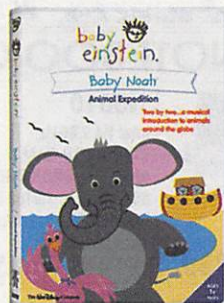
www.babyeinstein.com

\$15.99

Ages: 1-2

Pro: Encourages interaction

Con: Too easy to just hit "repeat" to occupy a child's attention

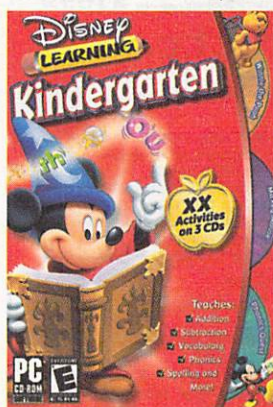


The Baby Einstein DVDs have proven one of the most popular forms of modern edutainment for very young children. A plastic disc might not be the most exciting present for your infant to tear

open on Christmas morning, but both you and your baby will be very pleased once you put it in your DVD player.

Baby Noah, the newest entry in the Baby Einstein series, takes babies and toddlers on a playful voyage around the world, introducing them to animals through live video, cartoons, and toys. As each animal is shown, babies are presented with names of the animals, both spoken and in text. The presentation moves very slowly, repeats content often and encourages toddlers to speak and read the names of the animals.

The disc also comes with more interactive games that allow parents to get involved with their children, including discovery cards, a fun activity that encourages children to replicate the sounds of animals, and a name-the-animal challenge.



new Disney character, Stanley, introduces children to a wide variety of sea animals in puzzles and memory games.

Kindergarten

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Children's Music Journey

www.adventus.com

\$199.99 with MIDI keyboard (\$44.95 software only)

Ages: 4-8

Pro: A fun (and earnest) approach to music education

Con: Must pay for each year separately

Acclaimed Halifax-based music software developers Adventus Interactive's Children's Music Journey is a serious music learning program for children aged four to eight. Children's Music Journey teaches children how to read, write and play music on a home PC using a

MIDI keyboard.

Children are instructed via colourful, witty, animated composers like Beethoven and Mendelssohn.

Interactive music games are mingled with more traditional lessons and creative exercises.

Each year of the three year program is priced at \$44.95.

At press time the retail release date was unknown, though Adventus hoped to have it out before Christmas.

By Chad Sapieha



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6 Channel Sound O/B
Amplified Speakers
PS/2 Mouse
104 Win Keyboard

SUMMIT AMD \$349⁹⁷

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40 GB ATA 133 Hard Drive
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64MB AGP Video Shared
10/100 Network Interface
3D Sound O/B
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SUMMIT VALUE

Pentium 4 @2.4A GHz

W/1MB L2 Cache

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SUMMIT PERFORMER

Pentium 4-550 @3.4 GHz

W/1MB L2 Cache

ASUS P5GD2 S.775 Motherboard
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2x 512MB Dual DDR RAM PC- 400MHz
160 GB 8M Cache 7200rpm Hard Drive
1.44 Floppy Drive
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Pentium 4 @2.8 GHz

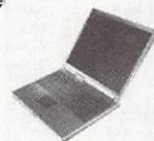
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Estimated price: \$1,000

Pro: great zoom, image stabilization

Con: big, expensive, small memory card

An update of the excellent FZ-10, the 5MP Lumix FZ-20 sports the same 12x optical zoom lens and comes with optical image stabilization to compensate for unsteady hands – either at maximum zoom or for long-exposure shots in low light.

The camera includes great manual features, including a manual focus ring and control over aperture and shutter speed.

It's not quite pro, but it's pretty darn close.

By Sean Carruthers



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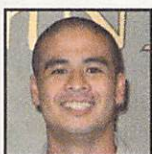
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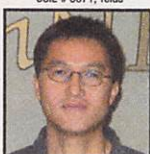
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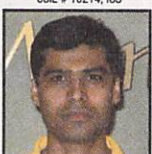
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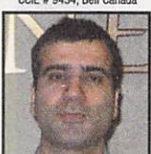
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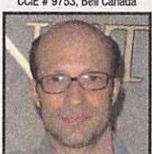
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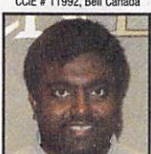
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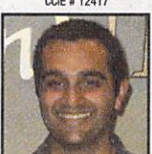
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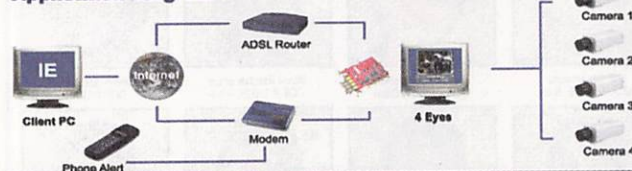
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Application Diagram



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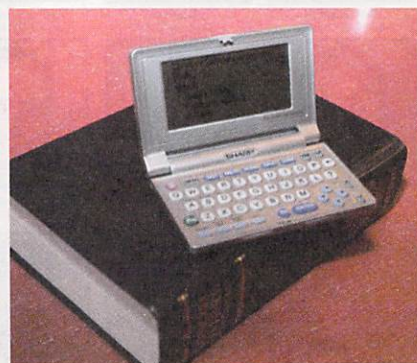
a lanyard and extension cable and is compatible with all operating systems that recognize removable drives. The drive comes in 128, 256 and 512MB and 1GB capacities, and an even larger 2GB drive has been announced. Once nice difference: a small write protect switch at the end of the drive. Not so nice: the high price.

It's educational

Sharp PW-E560 "ED"

www.sharpelectronics.com

Estimated price: \$170



Don't know what a certain word means? Let "ED" help out. Sharp's E560 electronic dictionary comes with Oxford Dictionary of English onboard. You can also translate English to French (or vice versa) using the included Oxford-

Hachette dictionary or use the device to do phrase searches or spell checks. If you're stuck in a crossword and feel like cheating, you can even type in the letters you know and look up matches. There's even a calculator and Metric/currency converter built in. The multi-line LCD display makes it quite easy to use. The unit is powered by a single AAA battery.

Fun fun fun

Robosapien

www.wowwee.com

Estimated price: \$125



What's not to like about a belching, farting, dancing robot? WowWee's Robosapien is a remote controlled robot toy that gives control over individual joints, and offers a number of pre-programmed "moves" like walking, turning, karate chops, dances and high-fives. The robot can even pick up light items and then throw them away. It has a very limited vocabulary

of caveman-like grunts, which means that kids will probably gravitate towards farting and burping. Joy. The Robosapien needs four D-sized batteries (installed in the feet), and three AAA batteries for the remote. Thankfully for parents (or annoyed spouses), there's an off switch on the robot's back.

By Sean Carruthers



20Q

20q.net/pocket.html Estimated price: \$27

Is it animal, vegetable, mineral, other or unknown? Actually, it's a semi-spherical lump of plastic with some pretty sophisticated artificial intelligence inside.

Users think of something (under the aforementioned categories) and hit buttons to answer the 20 questions. "Is it bigger than a loaf of bread?" "Do the police use it?" "Does it have short fur?" for example. More soul-searching questions like "Does it bring people joy?" are sure to leave users scratching their heads. Fortunately, ques-

tions can be answered with yes, no, unknown and sometimes. And the results are surprisingly accurate. Frighteningly so, in fact.

A bright red LED display shows the questions and throws in the occasional taunt.

20Q is the technological equivalent of a metal ring puzzle or similar; after being extricated from a stocking, it will be put through heavy use that day and swiftly forgotten about come the New Year only to be found again down the road and put back into circulation.

By Andrew Moore-Crispin

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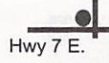
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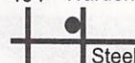
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Best bets in gaming

Consoles may get all the love in the media but we all know the best games are PC games, right?

If you agree the "lean forward" experience is better than the "sit back" approach, read on for a look at the year's finest computer games. The following picks are not listed in any order.

Half-Life 2

Price:	\$69.99	ESRB Rating: Mature (17+)
Who it's for:	PC gamers in search of a deep, story-driven adventure	
Rating (out 5):	4.5	
Pro:	Killer story; terrific graphics, realistic physics	
Con:	Few multiplayer options, steep system requirements	

One of the most hyped games of the year lives up to its predecessor with



an incredible sci-fi story, realistic physics and unprecedented graphics (if your video card can handle it). Similar to the groundbreaking 1998 title, Vivendi Universal's Half-Life 2 lets players once again battle against an alien invasion on Earth as Gordon Freeman – but

this time around the gutsy scientist has some help from Dr. Eli and the attractive Alyx Vance. New to this version: numerous drivable vehicles, funky weapons such as a gravity beam and memorable enemies to fight against including the 100-foot tall spider-like "Strider" creatures that can lift up humans and toss them around like rag dolls.

The Sims 2

Price:	\$59.99	ESRB Rating: Teen (13+)
Who it's for:	Megalomaniacs in search of a constructive rather than destructive game-play experience.	
Rating (out 5):	4	
Pro:	Wonderfully deep, addictive and open-ended game-play	
Con:	Long load times; some A.I. niggles	



This "sim"-play amazing sequel from EA Games lets players take control over their Sims for an entire lifetime – from baby to toddler to teen to adult – all the while helping them make decisions that can affect their social skills, love life and career. What's more, each Sim has its

own DNA that can be passed down through generations. Kids will resemble their parents in both look and personality. Sims also show more emotion than in the previous game because of life-like body language and facial

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animations. This game, which ships on multiple CDs or one DVD, also features an enhanced "Create-A-Sim" tool, a true 3D world and the ability to direct your own Sim sitcoms.

Myst IV Revelation

Canada's Ubisoft Montreal studios has given this classic Myst adventure series a shot in the arm with a game that is beautiful, interactive – and

Price:	\$49.99	ESRB Rating: "Everyone" [9+]
Who it's for:	Smart cookies who enjoy brainteasers	
Rating [out 5]:	4.5	
Pro:	Great puzzles, attractive visuals, terrific music	
Con:	Need DVD-ROM drive to play game, Hard drive space hog	



which took more than three years to create, are so lifelike that you'll want to touch them. Actually, in a way, you can. Using the mouse cursor, which resembles a small hand, you can "touch" water in a pond and ripples will

challenging. Similar to past games where players must navigate through various surreal "ages" to solve tough conundrums, Revelation adds a deeper storyline and more character interaction. The environments in the game,



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appear, or if you try to pet the wings of a bird that lands next to you, it will fly away. Gamers can also adjust the level of hints – or take none at all.

Men of Valor

Price: \$49.99 **ESRB Rating:** "Mature" (17+)
Who it's for: Action fans and history buffs alike
Rating (out 5): 4 stars
Pros: An immersive action game with a good story
Cons: Questionable A.I.; Vietnam theme overdone this year

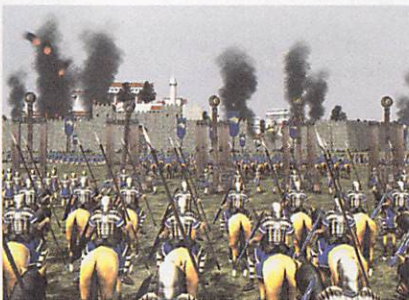


The humid jungles of Vietnam serves as the backdrop to Vivendi Universal's Men of Valor, an intense action war game set during one of the most controversial conflicts in modern history. The game follows a U.S. marine – from the beginning stages of the

Southeast Asian conflict to 1968's Tet Offensive – as he accomplishes varied goals with his group of fellow soldiers. Players can expect historically accurate weapons, familiar imagery and music from the era that helps make this game an authentic – if not sobering – experience for mature players. Multiplayer options also add to the game.

Rome: Total War

Price: \$59.99 **ESRB Rating:** "Teen" (13+)
Who it's for: Strategy nuts looking for the Next Big Thing
Rating (out 5): 4
Pro: Grand scale, memorable campaigns, technically impressive
Con: Some A.I. problems; couple of bugs



Armchair generals can rewrite history in Activision's Rome: Total War, An epic strategy game that lets players experience epic battles involving generals such as Julius Caesar and Hannibal. By selecting troops, tactically placing them on a map and then

selecting actions for them to carry out, gamers can watch skirmishes unfold from a birds-eye view or by zooming in for a detailed close-up. Unlike its predecessors, Shogun: Total War and Medieval: Total War, this sequel can render as many as 10,000 motion-captured 3D warriors on the screen at the same time. This technological feat results in a grand cinematic experience not seen in any PC strategy game to date. The game includes a tutorial, story campaigns, random melee battles and online support for up to eight players.

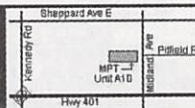
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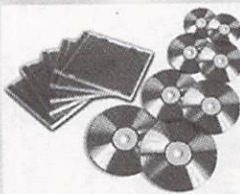
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The right game console for you and yours

All video game consoles are not created equal.

While there are clear differences in the technical specification sheets for Nintendo's GameCube, Microsoft's Xbox and Sony's PlayStation 2, the biggest difference is perhaps seen in each company's focus and strategy. Choosing the right video game console isn't so much about comparing the tech specs. Rather, the decision should be based on how closely each company's approach to gaming fits with your own ideals.

Nintendo GameCube

While Nintendo is in the process of stepping away from its kiddie reputation somewhat, the company maintains much of its generally PG approach. Its cross-franchise character outings like Mario Golf, Mario Tennis, and Super Smash Bros. along with some – but not all – of its franchise games could rightly be called "cute."

That said, the system has a fair amount on offer for more mature gamers; games like the director's cut cum complete remake of Hideo Kojima's masterpiece Metal Gear Solid, Resident Evil exclusives and other titles in the works and on shelves.

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Nintendo's own brand of stylish gameplay is seen in titles like Legend of Zelda: the Wind Waker, Metroid Prime and Metroid Prime 2: Echoes, Mario titles like Paper Mario and Super Mario Sunshine (and anything with "Mario" in the title) and its colossal Pokémon franchise to name a few.

While the company certainly innovates, it's fair to say that if you've enjoyed Nintendo titles past - from Super Mario Bros. to the original Zelda game - you'll enjoy its current offerings.

Steer clear if online gaming is of particular interest.

Microsoft Xbox

Microsoft's Xbox doesn't have the wealth of endearing franchises that GameCube or to a lesser extent, PlayStation 2 have. However, its key franchise now in its second installment is the stuff of video gaming legend.

The five-star Halo franchise is certainly among the best arguments for the console, though console exclusives like the stellar Star Wars:

Knights of the Old Republic (and the hopefully equally stellar follow-up title) and others certainly don't hurt its cause.

An all in one online strategy through Xbox Live sweetens the pot for gamers interested in online play. The advantage of the Xbox Live service is that it creates a cohesive online experience. The downside is the monthly or yearly subscription fees associated with the service in the order of \$80 per year. Said fee closes the door to individual companies charging their own fees for online play.

Xbox is the more powerful of the three consoles. This power shows through in graphics fine tuned for the hardware displaying noticeably better than on other consoles playing the same game. And in the case the aforementioned exclusives, graphics that simply wouldn't be

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N-GageQD

Carriers have finally started to bundle the N-GageQD with service plans, bringing the price down as low as \$100 with a service plan and contract from Fido. As it stands, there are too few compelling games but some titles in the works and about to be released suggest the library is beginning to mature.

PlayStation 2 and its bulkier brother are the defacto choice for more casual gamers. That said, exclusive titles and franchises like Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas, Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater and much of the Final Fantasy series make a very compelling argument for hardcore gamers too.

Sony's own franchise characters and games like Sly Cooper, Ratchet & Clank and Jak and Daxter offer solid gameplay and a variably compelling stable of first-party software.

PlayStation 2's online initiative isn't as all encompassing as that of the Xbox. It is certainly a focus though, given the incorporation of an Ethernet port on the PS2 redesign. The majority of online PS2 games

possible on another current generation system. While Xbox doesn't travel well — owing to its gargantuan footprint and considerable heft — it is ironically the best candidate for LAN parties where devices are connected for multi-console multiplayer matches.

PlayStation 2

Recently redesigned into a much smaller and more svelte shell, the new

can be played without charge; only persistent world games like EverQuest Online Adventures and Final Fantasy XI tend to ask for monthly fees. Games like Ratchet & Clank: Up Your Arsenal with its excellent multiplayer give weight to the PS2's approach to online.

While game graphics are good on the whole, the PS2 is definitely starting to show its age. However, as the incumbent console and with some great exclusives to be had, it's a safe bet for any gamer on your list.

By Andrew Moore-Crispin

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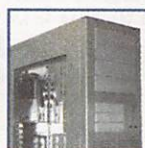
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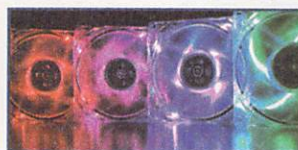
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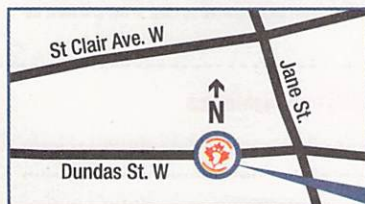
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In the House

• Deleted scenes

• Featurettes, including "The Bridget Jones phenomenon" and "Resolutions of a Tragic Spinster"

Though there is a distinct lack of so-called "chick flicks" being released on DVD this holiday season, this special edition of one of the most popular UK comedies of the new millennium tries to fill the void. A "chick-lit" favourite in the UK for several years, the Bridget Jones sensation flooded across the pond when Bridget Jones's Diary came to theatres in North America in 2001. The special edition DVD, released to coincide with its sequel's arrival in theatres, features a wide variety of special features that fans of the Bridget Jones franchise won't want to miss, including over 100 original diary columns.

For Hobbits:

The Lord of the Rings: Return of the King (Special Extended Edition)

5 (out of 5) www.lordoftherings.net \$37.99

Special Features include:

- 50 minutes of additional footage
- Four audio commentaries by the director and writers, the design team, the production team and the cast (featuring more than 30 participants)
- 16 documentaries, including "J.R.R. Tolkien: The Legacy of Middle-earth" documentary
- Photo galleries
- Interactive maps
- Additional short films

The last hurrah for Peter Jackson's Lord of the Rings trilogy, the long-awaited release of the special extended edition of Return of the King features the final bits of brand new footage we're ever likely to see from this epic franchise. If the 200 minute finale put your butt to sleep, you'd better get a comfier chair for the extended edition that, with over 50 minutes of additional footage, clocks in at well over four hours. New scenes include a showdown between Gandalf and Saruman, the Mouth of Sauron on horseback confronting the Fellowship, Aragorn showing off his fancy healing skills, and additional scenes with Borimir.

For the holidays:

Elf

4 (out of 5) www.elfmovie.com \$26.99

Special Features include:

- Two commentaries by director Jon Favreau and actor Will Ferrell
- Deleted Scenes
- Nine featurettes
- Interactive games

Many people questioned SNL alumni Will Ferrell's ability to carry a movie on his own, but his leading role in last year's holiday blockbuster Elf assuaged concerns. A rare family movie that appeals to children and parents in equal measure, Elf tells the story of Buddy, a human raised as a Christmas elf at the North Pole. When Buddy grows up he goes in search of his real father. In the world of humans his sweetness and lack of experience make him a misfit, but his charming innocence proves to be the key to winning the friendship of characters in the movie and the hearts of its audience. Oh yeah – it's rolling-in-the-aisles funny, too.

By Chad Sapieha



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THE RULES: You must use a digital camera to capture the subject. Work can be submitted via email (contest@ppublishing.ca). Accompanying your photo should be the make and model of the camera you used, the names of any software you used to modify the image and, if possible, the f/stop and shutter speed you used to take the photo.

Submit your photographs, along with the information from the form below, by December 20th, 2004. You can submit up to three photographs, all of which must be accompanied by a submission form. Entries must be submitted via email. Files should be no bigger than 500 KB and no smaller than 300 KB. One photo per email.

Contest Rules: Prizes must be claimed by January 21st, 2005. Winners must provide valid identification upon claiming prize. The prizes awarded are not transferable and cannot be redeemed for cash. To enter and to be eligible to win, persons must be residents of Canada, and not employees or be domiciled with an employee of Piccolo Publishing, its affiliate companies, or advertising or promotional agencies. The winners will be selected by HUB on December 23rd, 2004 from among all eligible entries received on or before contest close date. Winners will be contacted by telephone or email. In the event that they cannot be contacted within the first week following the contest another entrant will be selected. All entries become the property of HUB and may be used in subsequent advertisements for the contest. All entries must be submitted by their artist and must be original work.

HUB's Photo Spree contest form. All submissions must contain this information. Send to contest@ppublishing.ca

Deadline: December 20th, 2004

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Address:

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Phone Number:

Age:

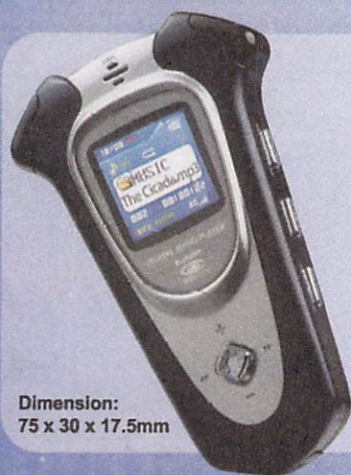
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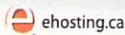
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out jack (and cables) to share those memories on a big screen, if so desired. Battery life offers up to 15 hours of music playback or up to five hours of slideshows.

Sony DVD Dream System

Who it's for: Movie, TV and music buffs who don't have time or interest to buy components separately

Price: \$1,299

Web site: www.sonymstyle.ca

If you've been holding off on buying that home theatre setup or if you're ready for an upgrade, Sony's DVD Dream System is an all-in-one solution that features a powerful receiver/amplifier/tuner (with support for DTS, Dolby Digital and Dolby Pro Logic decoding), a 5-disc progressive scan DVD player and five floor-standing wireless speakers to spread throughout the family room. Best of all, it's a breeze to set up and configure thanks to its colour-coded connectors. Total system power is 800 watts, of which 150 watts is reserved for the bass-rumbling subwoofer.



The DVD changer also accepts SACDs (SuperAudio CDs), CDs burned with MP3s or JPEG images for slideshows. See why it's called a "dream system"?

Canon PowerShot Pro1

Who it's for: Snap-happy photographers who want a prosumer solution

Price: \$1,099

Web site: www.canon.ca

Immortalize the world around you with a top-of-the-line consumer cam that can make you look like a veteran shutterbug. This whopping 8MP digital camera enjoys a powerful Canon L-series 7X zoom lens, multiple shooting modes and a host of professional-grade capabilities. What's more, its proprietary DIGIC Imaging Processor means you can get great shots even as close-up as a half-inch from your subject thanks to its "super micro" shooting feature. You can also record video clips (with audio) in VGA quality. Other features include a swiveling 2-inch LCD monitor (with an industry leading 235,000 pixels), CompactFlash card, wireless controller and more.



By Marc Saltzman

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Gift guide: Cell phone fever



Sony-Ericsson K700i (GPRS)

Website: www.sonyericsson.com **Estimated price:** \$500-600 (without plan)

Pro: natural camera function, Bluetooth

Con: very expensive, no carrier yet

The K700i is a camera phone, but it's a camera phone designed to function naturally in both phone and camera mode. When you're using it as a phone, you hold it upright to your ear. When you switch to camera mode, you flip it horizontally, the same orientation used for most digital cameras. The camera itself is only VGA resolution (640x480) but it does feature a 4x digital zoom for getting in closer. The phone has built-in Bluetooth, allowing it to hook up to a headset, speakerphone or PC. The phone is available through mobilefly.com for the time being, but will hopefully be available directly from the carriers soon.

Kyocera "Energi" K494 (CDMA 1x)

Website: www.telusmobility.com **Estimated price:** \$25 - 130 (depending on plan)

Pro: user-customizable, bonus flashlight

Con: pretty basic

Kyocera's line of cell phones has recently gone through a redesign and "Energi" is one of the new models. The Energi is a fairly basic handset, but it does have the ability to display images on the small LCD screen and users can customize the phone by swapping off the faceplate for another one. There's even a flashlight built in.



Samsung a680 (CDMA 1X)

Website: www.bellmobility.com **Estimated price:** \$299 - \$449 (depending on plan)

Pro: tiny, video capture

Con: expensive

Samsung's new a680 handset is so small you'd be forgiven for not realizing that it's not only a phone but also a camera phone. A camera phone that can even shoot up to 15 seconds of video, that is. Oh, and it has a built-in flash too. The phone's designed to work on Bell's 1x data network, which means quick transfer of your photos and videos to other phones or via email. The a680 sports a very easy-to-use menu system, which is a crowning feature. Innovation comes at a cost though.

Nokia N-Gage QD (GPRS)

Website: www.fido.ca **Estimated price:** \$150 - \$250 (depending on plan)

Pro: gaming on your cell phone, good redesign

Con: it's still a game deck first and phone second

Nokia's second venture into the combo game/cell category comes up a relative winner for a few key reasons. First of all, the phone portion is a lot more natural to use with the earpiece on the front face instead of one of the edges. More importantly, the gaming is more natural now too, with an improved button configuration and the ability to swap games in and out of the MMC slot without having to shut down and remove the battery first. You can still play wireless head-to-head gaming via Bluetooth or over the cell data network

BlackBerry 7100r

Website: www.rogers.com **Estimated price:** \$399+ (depending on plan)

Pro: more phone-centric, still gives good email

Con: data input requires time to get used to

Think BlackBerry and you're thinking of a corporate data-centric device, right? Wrong! The new version of the BlackBerry sports a redesign that's friendlier to the cell phone user with obvious number keys right down the centre of the keyboard. The QWERTY keys are still there, but they're multi-letter keys instead and as you type, the phone guesses words using its built-in dictionary. Some things are a bit hit and miss, but with practice, it's not only more phone-friendly than previous models of the BlackBerry, it's also more text-friendly than most other phones.

By Sean Carruthers





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Memory Bandwidth : 8.8 GB/sec
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VGA + TV Out
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AGP 8X DDR
VGA + TV Out
P/N: 064-A8-NV93-LX

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e-GeFORCE FX 5200

128MB / 64-bit / 5ns
AGP 8X DDR
DVI-I + VGA + TV Out
P/N: 128-A8-N304-LX

128MB / 64-bit / 5ns
AGP 8X DDR
VGA + TV Out
P/N: 128-A8-N303-L2

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Digital Photography Tutorial 11

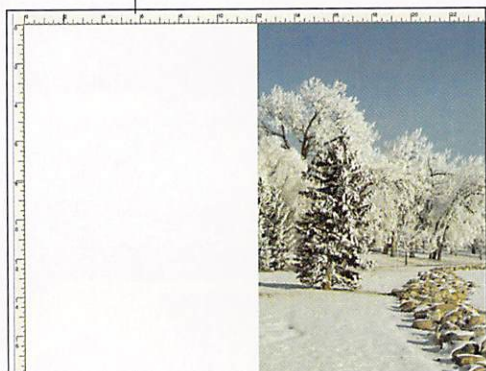
'Tis the season to make your own cards

If you've taken a photo you're proud of, why not share it by creating greeting cards? Cards are typically made of a single piece of card folded in half. This creates four pages: the cover (page 1), two inside pages (pages 2 and 3) and the back (page 4). You can have the fold on the left (book style) or on the top (tent style). Here's a step-by-step guide using Jasc Paint Shop Pro. In this example, we'll make 11.5 x 17.5 cm book-style cards but you can plug in your own dimensions. We also want the image to be a full bleed (no white border showing).

Outerscreen

Step 1. Set up the cover template: Open a new image and set width to 24 cm and height to 18 cm. The image size is set

larger than the actual card size so that the image spills over the card's borders. Trim to the final size and voila, you have a card with a full bleed image. Set



Innerscreen

resolution to 300 pixels per inch. Select raster image and uncheck transparent. Using the rulers, drag a guideline to the 12 cm mark on the horizontal ruler. This represents the fold.

Step 2 Prepare and place the card image: You want your final image to be 12 cm wide and 18 cm tall, with a resolution of 300 pixels per inch. Cut it, and then paste it as a layer into the cover template. Use the move tool to position into the right side of the image area with the image's left edge touching the guideline. The left half of this layout, which is blank, becomes the back of the card once the paper is folded. You can optionally place text or another image here.

Step 3 Preparing text for the inside: For a book-style layout, page 2 will be to the left of the fold and page 3 will be to the right of the fold. Start by creating an identical template to the

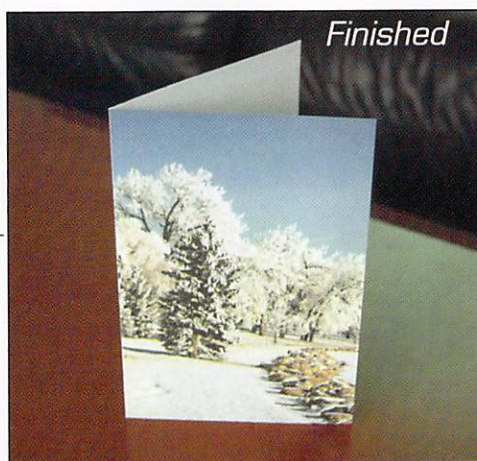
one you made in step 1. Use the text tool to write a suitable message then position it appropriately.

Step 4 Printing: this is straightforward. This particular design will fit on a standard letter-size card. Make sure to set the printer to "centre image," print the cover, then turn the paper over and print the template you made in step 3. The only thing to watch for is that when the card is folded, the inside isn't upside down in relation to the outside.

Step 5 Fold and trim: use a straight edge and a blunt pointed instrument (an organizer stylus works) to score the card precisely along the inner border of the image. This scoring will make the fold clean and precise. To ensure the card ends up square, trim the top and bottom at right angles to the folded edge, then trim the right edge last.

Special considerations for tent-style cards: on tent cards, the centre guideline represents the top edge for both the front and back covers. Remember to place the contents for the back cover upside down in relation to the front cover so that when the card is folded, the information on both sides will be right side up.

By David Tanaka



resolution to 300 pixels per inch. Select raster image and uncheck transparent. Using the rulers, drag a guideline to the 12 cm mark on the horizontal

Blue Pixel Personal Photo Coach: Digital Photography Tips From the Trenches

By David Schloss

Peachpit Press

ISBN 0-321-30528-0

Paperback, 304 pages,
\$37.99

Wouldn't it be great to have a team of pro photographers around to give you tips on how to take better photos? The Blue Pixel Personal Photo Coach attempts to provide that kind of advice, and largely succeeds. (Blue Pixel is a group of pros dedicated to sharing their knowledge.) It's packed with tips and strategies, and is the kind of book you could flip open to any page and read something useful or become inspired by a dynamic photo.

Though not a big volume it is well organized into topics that cover technical and aesthetic aspects of photography as well as providing advice on how to take specific kinds of pictures, such as portraits or sports shots. Highly recommended for beginners through intermediate photographers.

By David Tanaka



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Nintendo DS

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Nintendo DS at launch

No matter how innovative, a game platform can only be as successful with a variety of games and a "killer app."

Nintendo estimates 20-25 games will be available by the end of Q1 2005 and is promising 10-12 titles in or around the launch including:

Metroid Prime Hunters: First Hunt
Super Mario 64 DS
Spider-Man 2
Madden NFL 2005
Tiger Woods PGA Tour Golf
The Urbz: Sims in the City
Ping Pals
Feel the Magic: XY/XX
Rayman DS
Asphalt: Assault GT
Sprung
Ridge Racer DS

Before release, two million Nintendo DS (dual screen) systems were pre-ordered at \$199.99, according to Nintendo. The company raised its expectations for overall sales before the end of its fiscal year (March 31) accordingly, from 3.5 to four million.

There are some interesting somewhat-new concepts at work in the DS which launched Nov 21. First and most notable are the two distinct 3-inch LCD screens that grace the system, the lower of which is touch sensitive.

We saw some examples of how the touch screen can be put to use on early but working DS prototypes on

large part to a small addition that makes a huge difference. The retail DS comes with a simple wrist strap, similar those that come with cell phones, MP3 players and all manner of portable personal electronics. However, at the end of said wrist strap resides a hard plastic pad that can be cinched to the thumb. This little addition makes the lower screen act much like an analogue control stick on a home console system. Motion is much more fluid in this specific title as a result.

Gamers also have the option of using the included stylus that slips into the back of the unit a-la Palm handheld, which is optimal where more drawing and tapping are concerned. That's not to say the stylus itself is optimal, however. It's too short and becomes unwieldy as a result. Tapping out messages or controlling the viewpoint using the too-short stylus is a recipe for hand cramps as players get used to it.

While Nintendo hasn't been talking too much about its online plans for the DS, the unit has 802.11b standard WiFi capability for future online gaming and a proprietary wireless technology for local multiplayer. The Metroid demo cartridge includes multiplayer over the local standard but not online. Hopefully, this will be included in the full retail version of the game. However, the pre-installed PictoChat application – users draw pictures and tap out text on the bottom screen to send and receive messages from up to 15 other DS owners in chat rooms – doesn't include any form online functionality, which is a surprise and a disappointment. With one ARM9 and one ARM7 processor – one for each screen – up to 10 hours of life from the rechargeable Li-Ion battery and backwards compatibility with existing Game Boy Advance cartridges, the DS is not your average handheld.

By Andrew Moore-Crispin

the show floor at this year's Electronic Entertainment Expo (E3). Wario Ware DS, for example, had gamers slicing fish, tracing objects, tapping items and performing any number of other stylus-specific actions in a series of frenetic "micro games." A demo of Metroid Prime Hunters locked gamers in four-player death matches where the lower screen displayed a first-person view. To look, gamers dragged a stylus across the screen and shooting was accomplished by tapping same.

Metroid Prime Hunters specifically was an interesting concept at that stage but lacked somewhat in usability.

The first DS units on retail shelves are bundled with a three single-player level and three multiplayer map demo of Metroid Prime Hunters subtitled First Hunt. Users can now choose from a variety of control schemes tailored to left- and right-handed gamers either with or without using the touch screen.

Metroid's lead character Samus is a dream to control in a first-person perspective, matching even her console outings in this regard. This is thanks in



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